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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

Take for granted that all that has happened, is happening or will happen, is with his will. So whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we should remain contented. If he sends us misery, we should accept it with pleasure, and if he keeps us happy we should take it as his children. So do not consider that your life is not a bed of roses. Take it as his gift and be happy in it. “Misery is a blessing in disguise,” says Shakespeare. Misery is a medicine and pleasure is a disease, for in pleasure the mind dominates and keeps us away from the path. You say you are thirsty for knowledge; knowledge is in the sound current. It is within you. Go within, ride the sound current, and be the master of all knowledge.

From the time of initiation, when the Master takes over the charge of a soul, he is more anxious than the soul to see it installed on the throne of bliss and peace. Even if the devotee, through some chance, leaves the Master or loses faith in him, he, on his part, never leaves. He will someday bring the devotee on the path again. His mission is to take souls up, and a soul once initiated is never deserted. This is the law.

A place free from the strife and turmoil of the busy world is more suitable for concentration, and I am glad to read that you feel happy in your new surroundings.

Birth follows desire. We are born again and again because the attention is given deeply to desires, and unfulfilled desires bring the attention back. When the desire is for the Master and not for things of this world, then why should we return to this world after death? The attention will go up. And for those who have, while living, concentrated up to the eye focus, there is no return after death.

The Master is waiting for you at the eye focus and is anxious to receive you there in his arms; it is for you to rise up to the eyes.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



Faith

Often we experience circumstances that create chronic uncertainty. Without any firm ground to stand on, we may feel anxious and afraid. Let's face it – when we stand on the edge of the unknown, looking over the edge can be very frightening. It may seem that as we were gaining some momentum in life, something unexpected happens and we lose our balance. We stumble, fall on our faces, pick ourselves up and begin again.

What carries us through these times is his grace and our faith. Our meditation. And holding on to our anchor.

We tend to lose sight of this, focusing too much on the problem, and forget to hold on to our anchor. We forget what faith is all about.

Faith is the polar opposite of fear. Faith makes fear irrelevant. Here is the mystical and exquisite thing about faith – it is hiding in plain sight. Faith is not something we have; rather, faith finds us. But we can never come to know faith until we have absolutely nothing else to stand on. Faith arrives when our strategizing, planning, wishful thinking and scheming fall apart. It appears when we finally surrender, when we are humbled and fall down on our knees. In those sacred moments, the grace of faith may descend upon us. And if we are receptive, it will sustain us.

To embrace faith, we must let go of our doubts and fears, give up our struggles, and say, and truly mean, Thy will be done.

As the author writes in *One Being One*:

When we think we have been abandoned, he may be protecting us. When we wonder where his help has gone, he may be supporting our every step. When we think we are unloved, he may be cradling us in His arms. When we think we have doubts, he may be deepening our faith.

Attuning to the tranquillity within

We can take an example from Indian classical music, in which it is important to align one's attention with one note, *sa*. Myriad beautiful compositions, soul-lifting ragas and exquisite renditions stem from this single attunement process. Every performer fine tunes her instrument to that unique note before she begins her concert. And this process

continues right till the end of the performance. And so it is with us. We need to attune ourselves to that one divine power while we go through the performance of our life, despite all the noise, chaos and confusion around us. Then we will be able to withdraw into an oasis of peace within. When we are attuned to that tranquillity within, we do not need a peaceful environment because no matter what is going on around us, as long as we remember him and hold fast to his presence within us, we are at peace.

Anchored in his love

It is said that bees, when caught in a storm, balance themselves by carrying tiny pebbles up in the air with their feet, so they will not be carried away by the storm. So too can we by holding fast to our love for the Master to preserve our balance through the storms of life. Our relationship with him is our only permanent relationship – the only one bond that will remain true, steadfast and eternal in this world and beyond.

But much like grace on the path, faith is a two-way street. Our meditation will help us strengthen our faith and live according to the teachings. At the same time, as we develop more faith on the path, we will automatically give a higher priority to our meditation. When we are indifferent to our meditation, when we do not make it the most important daily event in our lives, we are losing the opportunity to develop the faith we need to follow the path.

Please remember that true faith only comes from meditation. The more you meditate with love and devotion, the more faith you get.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Hazur often used to say that the Master is closer than our own breath. The Lord is taking care of us every second of our lives. We just need to delve inside and feel his presence. He is our one true friend, whom we can love like no other love and whom we can count on unconditionally.



Something to Think About

An initiate should never break the sacred pledges made at the time of initiation. If one cannot make this small sacrifice for the sake of attaining God-realization, then all talk of love of God and devotion is without meaning.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Please remember that our own mind is our only enemy and creates all sorts of illusions and delusions to lead us astray. We have to fight this power through meditation with faith and devotion. Do not worry. Once the Master takes charge of a soul, he takes it back home. It is only a question of time, which depends on how soon we are able to unburden ourselves of our karmas and are free to go back home.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Am glad to know that you appreciate the privilege of initiation and are putting in the regular hours of meditation. It is, however, a very slow process, except in the case of those who have trodden the path in a previous incarnation. You should not expect results too soon. Slow and steady wins the race. Also, what is achieved and consolidated gradually is lasting.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



An Excuse to Forgive

*For I am near, and will restore all things, not only completely,
but generously and in full measure.*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

There is a common theme in the writings of the saints on God's forgiveness and love for errant human beings. Like a loving parent, the divine presence is always there to welcome us with open arms, however much we may have been rolling in the mud. He is the one who, in the fullness of time, will draw the soul back to himself.

In reference to the clearing of our karmas, we often hear that the Master sometimes reduces the blow of a hammer to a pinprick. We may still go through our fate karmas but their negative effects are much reduced. This is because, by the grace of the Master, we learn to rise above them. But to grow in that awareness, we have to diligently practise the meditation taught to us at the time of initiation.

*Your slowness in turning to prayer is the greatest obstacle to receiving
My heavenly comfort.*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Meditation inculcates receptivity towards the blessings we receive. It increases our awareness of the support we get when going through our destiny. We develop a conviction that we are not alone, and our faith grows.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own
understanding, in all your ways, acknowledge him and he will make your
paths straight.*

Bible, *Proverbs 3:5-6*

There is a Vedic school of thought known as the Vadagalai. This philosophy advocates that a devotee's attitude should be like that of a baby monkey, which is carried about and protected by its mother and yet has to cling to her in order to be carried. In other words, according to this school, a spiritual aspirant must take some positive steps, like the baby monkey that exerts itself in order to cling to its mother. In fact, the Vadagalai School is

nicknamed 'the monkey school,' as it lays stress on the collaboration of the devotee with God, just as the baby monkey clings to its mother.

Wait patiently for Me, and I Myself will come and heal you.

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

We need to exercise patience in our relationship with the Lord. There is so much he has to help us work through in terms of our karmas and spiritual growth. Only the Lord knows what is best for us. Our limited understanding cannot comprehend his ways. This is where we need to rest our limited intellect upon the wisdom of God. By doing so, we will experience contentment and equanimity during our spiritual journey, even when our life is filled with trials and tribulations.

Do not imagine yourself utterly forsaken if for a while I have allowed some trial to harass you, or withdrawn the comfort that you desire; for this is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven. Be assured that it is better for you, and for all My servants, to struggle against difficulties than to have everything as you wish.

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Often, we lose patience with the process and focus on our apparent lack of progress or think that perhaps we are being tested. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Many a mystic has said, "let our faith never be tested, because if it were, we would never pass such a test". Instead of testing us, the Lord finds excuses to forgive us. That is why the Great Master encouraged us to come to him even with our failures, and why Hazur Maharaj Ji would tell us to sit in meditation, considering it a duty even if we did not feel like it. This clinging to the instructions of the Master and our attempts to submit to his will are just excuses for him to forgive us.

There is grace – we can always depend upon that. You see, if the student is very obedient in class, and very disciplined, the master, the professor, is always anxious to pull him through with one excuse or another. So if we are not intelligent enough to secure that high standard, let us at least be disciplined and good and obedient so that we can invoke his grace to get through.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II

We can get insight into the Lord's generosity from a story told in modern American folklore of a young man who left home shortly before the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Angry with his parents, tired of his family, and frustrated with rural life on the farm, he wanted excitement, adventure and experience. So, after quarrelling with his parents, he left home, seeking fame, fortune and a glamorous life in the big city. But when the Depression struck, employment was scarce, and instead of wealth and luxury, the young man found himself living in poverty on the streets.

Feeling nostalgic, he thought of his home and his family, remembering the comfort, love and security they had once provided. But in the years he had been away, he had never contacted his parents, and now he was too ashamed to seek their forgiveness and ask to be taken back into the family home.

As times got harder, he eventually found the courage to write to his parents. He told them he was sorry for having caused them so much pain and distress. He also confessed that he was afraid to face them and ask for forgiveness in case they would reject him. Nevertheless, he told them that he had collected enough money for the train ride home and would be arriving at their local station on a particular day. The railway track ran near their farm, and the young man asked them to tie a white handkerchief on the old apple tree that stood near the tracks if they forgave him. If he saw the handkerchief from the train, then he would know that he could alight at the station and be welcomed home. If there was no handkerchief, he would return to the city.

The young man set out on his journey. Seated in the compartment, he was lost in thought. Next to him sat an older gentleman who drew him into conversation. Little by little, the older man heard the whole story.

As they approached the tree, the young man became increasingly agitated. Finally, he said to his new friend, "I cannot look. You look and tell me what you see." When the train approached the farm, the young man covered his eyes, while the older man looked out the window. "Well," asked the young man, his voice shaking, "do you see a white handkerchief?"

“No,” said the old gentleman. But he was smiling. “There is not *one* white handkerchief. The whole tree is festooned with white handkerchiefs!”

Mystics remind us that the breeze of God’s grace is always blowing, but one needs to unfurl the sails of the boat in order to feel it. Our humble but sincere efforts at meditation and virtuous living are nothing but an excuse for the Master to forgive all that comes between us and the Lord.

The gardener is more anxious that the tree should yield fruit. Master is anxious to finish his responsibility, anxious that all the souls allotted to him should go back to the home of the Father. He doesn’t withhold his grace at all.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II



The True Form of the Master

When we are in the presence of the physical form of the Master, nothing else seems more important. We feel secure and protected under his shelter, and a sense of peace fills our being. His words of truth nourish our soul, and in his presence, for that short period of time, we forget ourselves. But what exactly is the purpose of the physical Master in our lives? Why does he travel from place to place, tirelessly, visiting hundreds of thousands of disciples? From the early hours of the morning until night, he gives his undivided attention to his disciples – regardless of his busy schedule – holding satsangs, private interviews, question-and-answer sessions, giving darshan – pleasing millions of yearning souls. Why does he give so much of himself to us?

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Bible, John 10:11

In *Light on Saint John*, Hazur Maharaj Ji explains this quote as though he – the shepherd – is talking directly to us, his sheep:

I am willing to sacrifice anything to save the souls allotted to my care, because my Father wants not a single soul to be lost. I must bring every marked soul back to him. This is my work. For this he has sent me to your level. I am prepared even to give my life to save them.

The only purpose of the Master's presence in our lives is to guide us back to our true home; to awaken us from this illusion that we are living in, and to make us realize our true self. He encourages and inspires us to tune into the Lord, so that we can invoke his grace and go back to our source. The physical form of the Master comes among us to fill us with love and devotion and to create that deep longing to become one with God. Because of the Master's divine qualities and his pure love, we are irresistibly attracted to the physical form.

A Master is a lover of God. In him there are boundless currents of true love. He is the physical form of that love. To love him is to find the most important medium for developing love for God, because he is a

manifestation of God, and his heart is full of love for him. By seeing him, love and longing for God increases.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II

The question then is, is it wrong to be attached to the Master's physical form? In a question-and-answer session, Hazur Maharaj Ji replied:

I don't think you can help having an attachment to the physical form of the Master. If you love the teachings, naturally you love the person giving you the teachings. But if we do not direct this love toward the form within ourselves, then we are not making the best use of our time.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Hazur Maharaj Ji explains that love for the physical form of the Master is very important on this path; but it is only a means to achieve the end. As much as we may yearn to be in the physical presence of the Master, we need to remind ourselves, that the purpose of our relationship with the Master is to turn inwards, to the real form. If we limit the Master to a physical being, then our relationship will always be at a physical level; we are limiting ourselves to a relationship which can never be permanent. Instead, if we channelize the love we have for the physical towards working harder in our meditation to reach the true form within – the Shabd – we will be able to experience the everlasting presence of the inner Master. Then there will never be separation – even at the time of death. During his last days, Christ told his disciples:

It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Bible, *John 16:7*

It is only natural for a disciple to question how it can be in the interest of a disciple for a Master to leave him physically. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains:

Christ says: My purpose of being in the body is fulfilled. I have shown you the path, I have filled you with love and devotion, I have shown you the destination. Now you have to work to achieve that destination. While I am in the body, you are not attending to the path or to the inner

spiritual journey. You are just running after me outside. But when I am not there and you are not able to live without me, then you will have no option but to look within and travel on that path and be one with me forever. So it is in your interest that I leave you.

Spiritual Heritage

In their writings, many saints speak of the excruciating pain caused by separation from their Master. But they also explain that sometimes this separation is a necessary phase in a disciple's life. It fills his heart with more longing, more love, more devotion, preparing him for a deeper, more everlasting relationship.

For forty years, in every satsang, Hazur Maharaj Ji's message was consistent: meditate and practise Nam. For thirty years we have heard the present Master repeatedly deliver the same powerful message. It does not matter how many years we have been initiated, or how many times we have seen the physical form of the Master, or how much love we feel in his presence – the true Master-disciple relationship can only be sustained and strengthened through sincere meditation. It is only when we practise the teachings earnestly that we can call ourselves disciples of a true Master. Through our spiritual practice, we awaken to his eternal presence where there is no separation. Hazur Maharaj Ji affirms this in his own words:

May your love of the Form culminate in the love of the Formless.

Legacy of Love



The Bulldozer

Imagine being chained to a massive machine like a bulldozer. It is so powerful, that once it starts moving forward, an ordinary human being, no matter how strong, would be powerless to stop it. He would only have two obvious options. One would be to stand up and walk along with it, or two, the more painful choice, just lie there and be dragged by it through the dirt.

Mystics have used this example to explain why simply being initiated on the path is not enough to achieve our goal of God-realization. They emphasize the importance of the disciple's effort.

Saints explain to us that initiation is a precious gift from the Master. In this special moment between Master and disciple, the Master plants the seed of Nam and connects the soul of the disciple to the divine melody of the Shabd – the supreme power that is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe. He then imparts the technique of how to nurture this seed of Nam through the practice of simran and bhajan. This gift once given, can never be taken away. Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot drown it. Time or illusion cannot destroy it. But, it grows only when it is nurtured by meditation.

Initiation is a mystical spark bestowed by a living Master to his disciples, thus igniting their dormant spiritual energy. Once lit, its fire keeps burning when the five names (simran) are constantly repeated.

Concepts & Illusions

When we adhere to the four vows and practise our meditation daily with love and devotion, we become aware of the presence of this supreme power that lies within us. With this power by our side, we have unfailing support. It gives us courage, strength, and confidence to cope with any crisis that comes our way. It enables us to face the ups and downs of this unpredictable human life and allows us to settle our karmic debts effortlessly. In other words, we have the power to choose to walk alongside the bulldozer.

But if after receiving initiation from the Master, we make excuses not to sit for meditation – we are tired, busy, sleepy, not feeling well; or perhaps we think it is a bit dry and boring and so we choose not to meditate – then we

will go through this tumultuous human life without the support of our spiritual practice, and end up battered and bruised, as if we were being dragged by a bulldozer.

Following the Master's 'hukam' will give us the wisdom to face a multitude of adversities. Without the anchor of meditation, our lives will be like a stormy sea, so he says, "follow," or meditate – for it will spare us from being "dragged."

Concepts & Illusions

On a positive note, there is good news. We are not alone. The Master is always by our side. He is the one who has pulled us on to the path. He is the one who has given us the gift of Nam and taught us how to meditate. He is the one cheering us on, providing us with the atmosphere that we need to be able to carry out our spiritual practice.

The only action required from us is to sit for meditation sincerely, every day. With chains of love, the Master is the one who has tied us to the bulldozer. In fact, if we look carefully to see who is driving this powerful machine, we would see that it is in fact our beloved redeemer, showering his grace upon us.

All he asks is that we make the effort to walk along with him – to just do our meditation and then leave the rest to him.

Meditation must be attended to every day, and then no matter how much you try to involve yourself in other activities, you'll never be allowed to go astray at all. You'll never be allowed to get involved so much that you forget your real path, because your chain is very strong – you are just tied down to that bulldozer and it will not let you go anywhere. So if we don't compromise with that, then everything will be all right.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III



The Pursuit of Happiness

The desire for happiness drives human life forward. We search for it through our career, relationships, money, power and fame. The sad truth is that we exhaust ourselves in an endless effort to experience happiness by satisfying our desires without ever achieving satisfaction.

It is like the anecdote about a man who was seen eating a basket of chillies. His tongue was swollen and his gums were bleeding profusely. So a passer-by asked him, “What are you doing? Why are you eating one chilli after another?” The man replied, “I keep hoping I will find a sweet one.”

In our pursuit of external desires, no doubt there are times when we feel happy and even believe that we have at last found what we were searching for. Inevitably, however, such happiness is fleeting and transitory. Eventually, we are left with a familiar feeling of emptiness but are unable to understand what it is. Even the richest or the most powerful person is subject to such despondency and loneliness. And no matter how hard we strive to achieve some satisfaction, some sense of belonging in this world, we find ourselves overcome by an inner discontent from which there is no escape.

In order to fill this gap in our lives, we look for solutions. We immerse ourselves in our work, or we attempt to buy happiness through objects and experiences. Eventually, we realize that whatever we pursue, sooner or later we are at the exact same spot on the ‘happiness treadmill’ as we were before.

Saints remind us that our necessities are minimal, so why this relentless pursuit of self-gratification? Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

What do we really need in this world? If we look broadly at our needs, how few we have! How much can one eat? How much can one wear? How many places to sleep do we need? We have so many rooms in our house, so many dishes on the table, so many restaurants and hotels to feed us, such variety of clothes and dresses to wear – wardrobes full. You can expand your needs as much as you like, or you can bring them to the minimum.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

There is no doubt that we should fulfil our basic needs. Saints and mystics, through their own example, strongly advocate everyone earning their own living. They have nothing against ambition. But they warn us not to be so overcome by greed and materialism that we become blind to the truth and compromise our principles. Life is simple but we complicate it by giving material comforts priority.

Saints continually remind us of the immense and priceless treasure that lies inside each one of us, but we seem to be too preoccupied with collecting pennies.

A Sufi mystic once pointed out the need for us to grasp the essence of life:

*An ocean is within your heart, O Farid,
why do you trudge along the shore?
Dive into the depths;
the pearl shall be found within.*

Sheikh Farid, The Great Sufi Mystic

In order to achieve real happiness, saints advise us to direct our efforts towards collecting our spiritual treasure through meditation. It is only when we look within that we can experience true and everlasting happiness. Maharaj Charan Singh Ji explains:

Meditation gives you that bliss, that peace, that happiness, that contentment within you. We are trying to seek happiness outside, in worldly objects, worldly possessions, worldly people. And the more we look there, the more miserable we become every day because our pursuit is absolutely in the wrong direction. Only if we try to find happiness within can we succeed in becoming happy. Nobody can find happiness in the sensual pleasures – there's frustration after that. The real happiness is only in meditation, nowhere else.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

It is through the practice of meditation that we come into contact with the bliss of the divine melody. When we attune ourselves to the Word, then the same mind that is constantly running after sensual pleasures becomes completely subdued. It ceases to chase short-lived pleasures in

the outside world. Instead, it is drawn inside to experience lasting peace and incomparable happiness.

The more the mind is drawn towards meditation, the more we learn to submit to the Lord's will. We entrust ourselves to the Master and begin to appreciate how he takes care of both our worldly and spiritual needs. Then, rather than chasing after the things of the world, we cultivate immense gratitude for whatever has been bestowed upon us. We realize that we actually want for nothing; that we already have *great riches* inside. And when this happens, we no longer need to pursue happiness. Happiness finds us.

If we live in his will and if we are grateful to him for whatever he has given us, then we feel extremely happy and light.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Legacy of Love*



The Master Answers

A selection of question and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

- Q: *I believe Great Master said that satsang is the haven of the agonized.*
- A: Yes, it is an anchor. You see, if your boat is caught in a storm and you reach the shore, you feel so relieved. We are all in the storm of our mind, and when we go to the satsang of the mystics, we find we can land on a shore. How relieved we feel. Satsang is a great anchor. We are always influenced by the company we keep. If you can become a drunkard by being with people who drink or a gambler by remaining in their company, why not become a devotee by remaining in the company of mystics and saints? It's the Lord's grace that we seek such company, and that we get such company. Christ said, wherever two or more meet in my name, I'll be there. What does that mean? That is why we have group meetings and discussions, because nothing but the Master and the teachings are discussed. In satsang we discuss nothing but the Lord.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

- Q: *Master, after we get initiated, sometimes it becomes very difficult to continue living with our families and friends who are not initiated.*
- A: You see, sometimes satsangis start feeling superior to the people they live with, thinking that they have become superhuman and that other people are inferior because they're not following the path. That hurts the ego of the other person, which creates discontentment and disharmony. Why should we feel superior or superhuman? We only have to do our duty in meditation. We should rather be an example to the people we live with and win them by more love and affection rather than acting superior. When we try to show that we have become something better, it hurts the other person's ego and it's very difficult for them to bear that. So slowly and slowly, conflict starts. We ourselves have a certain responsibility to behave as satsangis. We're all struggling souls. We're not born satsangis. After all, we have come to this by passing

through so many stages, and the people we associate with may be passing through the same stages. So we should be helpful and useful to others rather than show our superiority.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Master, are heaven and hell situated on this side of the first stage, of earth?*

A: This whole world is a heaven and hell. You can make this world a heaven, you can make this world a hell. They exist within you. If you make yourself hell, you are in hell here. If you make yourself heaven, you are in heaven here. Why think about hell and heaven? Make this world a place of heaven. Have that peace within yourself and this whole world will be at peace with you. If we are able to build that heaven within ourselves, then the whole world becomes heaven here. And if we make ourselves miserable, the whole world is miserable to us.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Q: *Master, if a person were to become desireless and without attachment, does it mean that he is karmaless?*

A: No. You see, karmaless is something very different. The moment we become karmaless the soul goes back to the Father – you can't exist in this creation. The very fact that we are in the body means that we have some karmas which are attaching us to this body. If we had no karma we would not be here at all. It is karma, fate karmas, which are keeping us bound to this flesh, this body. The moment we become karmaless we go back to the Father. If you can become desireless, you can become detached from the world. But you can't become karmaless by being in the flesh. Whatever you do in this world is karma. You drink, you eat, you walk, you talk, they're all karmas. They're all actions. So you can't become karmaless. You can have desireless actions – you're helping somebody, you have given something in charity, you are not desiring a reward. You can say that you have a desireless karma. But you can't become karmaless. It's impossible as long as you are in the flesh.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



It's That Simple

In a world filled with challenges at every stage of life, we have grown accustomed to believing that if we want something, we have to work for it. Getting good grades requires us to study hard. Securing a good job means beating the competition. Building a career entails long days and sleepless nights. We even wake up to motivational quotes that remind us that nothing worth having comes easy. We accept difficulties and challenges as part of life, especially when the goal is worthwhile.

This kind of positivity is a wonderful outlook because it teaches us to work through the difficulties that come our way. It keeps us resilient in times when we would rather give up. Having hope that each challenge leads to something wonderful gives us the strength to push past the struggle. However, when it comes to spirituality, this outlook can end up becoming an obstacle for us.

Having experienced so many complications and challenges in life, we may question the simplicity of the spiritual path. When we stand before the Master, asking for guidance as we try to embark on our spiritual journey, we receive answers that sound so simple. Our intellect then begins to doubt that simple answer. How can it be that straightforward? Surely, there is something we must have missed. But the Masters remind time and again that all it takes to travel the spiritual path is to be a good human being and to attend to our meditation regularly – it really is that simple. The teachings are not complex. They are as straightforward as they seem. We tend to over-analyze and complicate them by over-thinking.

When something is simple, we often find it difficult to accept. The mind goes into overdrive wondering how it can be so simple. There must be a catch, a trick we've missed. Our mind has the knack of making simple things complicated.

Concepts & Illusions

Once we have managed to convince ourselves that spirituality cannot be that simple, we look for alternative ways to reach our goal. We try everything instead of focusing on the one, simple answer that the Masters

have repeatedly given us. And then we find ourselves feeling defeated or unable to make any progress.

In spirituality, we reach a point where we need to suspend our intellect and adopt a childlike innocence, which will help us accept the simplicity of the teachings. We need to unlearn all that we have imbibed over the years and just work towards realizing the truth. The key word here being 'work'. It is one thing to realize that the teachings are simple, but quite another to understand that like all endeavours in life, we have to work hard to make progress.

All the Masters ask us to do is to sit in silence and focus with love and attention. Only when we do our work and experience the true Reality within will we realize that it really is just that simple.



The Soul's Homing Instinct

From the moment we gain some awareness in life, we are on a quest, a mission to be happy and content. We endeavour to fulfil our many desires, one after another, and hope that this will bring us that sense of happiness we long for. But we soon find out that none of our accomplishments have brought us any closer to the fulfilment of our purpose.

Through the wisdom of our Master, we discover that the destination we are looking for is not somewhere after the next turning point in life, but rather, deep within the core of our being – where our soul has her home in the lap of the Creator.

'Home' is a concept that holds great meaning in our lives; it is where we belong, where we start from and where we wish to end up. The very notion of home creates deep-rooted feelings of being loved and cared for, of being understood and appreciated, of being grounded and safe.

Salmon are a type of fish that swim hundreds of miles across the ocean or up rivers to return to their place of birth, where they lay their eggs and die soon afterwards. Turtles, pigeons, and rats, too, return after their long and wide wanderings to mate and die at home. This is a phenomenon that is known as a 'homing instinct,' and it has been observed and studied in many animals.

Similarly, our soul is equipped with its own homing instinct. In the Bible it is said that God has planted eternity in the human heart, and Hazur Maharaj Ji simplifies it further by saying:

The soul is always yearning to go back to its own source, to the Father.

Die to Live

For some of us, this instinct dictates every action and every choice we make, but for others it manifests as brief moments of loneliness and even feelings of hopelessness. The soul longs to go back to its home, and that longing always tugs at us one way or another. But how receptive we are to that homing instinct dictates how content and at peace we are in this world.

It sounds contradictory that one would feel more at peace when the soul's longing to go home intensifies. Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

What is the difference between longing to go back to the Father and having that peace and bliss within yourself? Those who are filled with love and devotion for the Father are in great agony, no doubt, but they would not like to exchange that agony for anything else in the world. It means that there is some peace, some solace, some happiness, even in that pain of longing and devotion, which they don't want to part with at any cost.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

The homing instinct of our soul will always keep us restless in this world, but at the same time our only shot at being happy is to face it and allow it to deepen. We can then find solace in the fact that we are making every possible effort, in every moment of our lives, to return home. It is the longing of our soul that will carry us there.

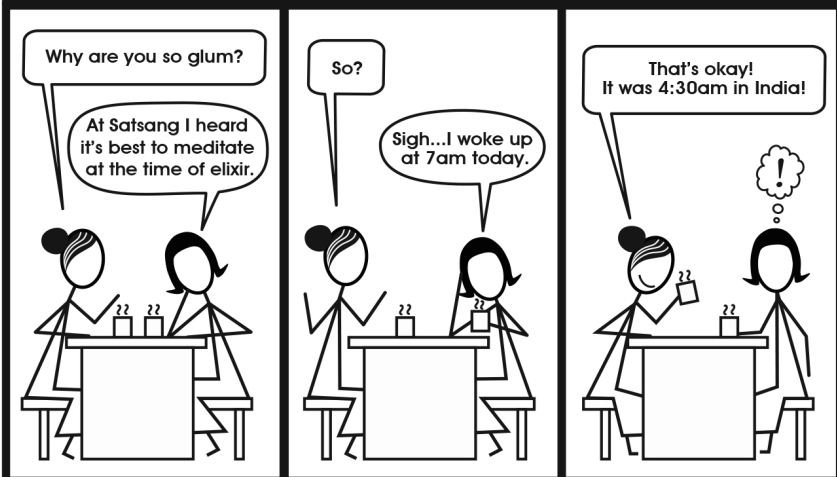
*Many talk of the pain and suffering of separation;
O pain, you are the ruler of all.*

Sheikh Farid, *The Great Sufi Mystic*



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Love

An Explanation by Maharaj Charan Singh

Love? Well, if there's love, there is nothing to speak about, and if you speak, there is no love. Love loses its depth when you try to express it. The more you digest it, the more it grows. It is more to experience than to express. What do you want to know about love?

You see, love has two aspects. It raises our soul upwards; then passion pulls us down. So we are more concerned with the devotional part of love. Love means to lose your own identity, to become another being, to merge into another one, to do which pleases the other person and not to do anything which displeases the other person. That is love. The soul by instinct is in love with the Father. The tendency of the soul is always towards its own origin. It is full of love and devotion for the Father, but it is just helpless due to the mind. The mind has a weakness for the senses, so it has become a slave of the senses. There is such a great load on the soul that its love is just crushed under that weight.

The soul cannot help but love its own origin. So we have to lift the weight of the senses, of the mind, of karmas or sins, before we can experience that love. And we feel real love when we go beyond the realm of mind and maya, when there are no coverings on the soul, when the soul shines, when it knows itself. Then it experiences the real love for its own Father, for its own origin. Love has the quality of merging into another being, becoming another being. Ultimately, we lose our own identity and individuality and become one with the Father. And that is why we say that love is God and God is love.

The more love you give, the more it grows. It is something which does not decrease by sharing. All other things decrease if you share them, but this is something within us which always grows and grows, the more and more we give. And the only way to experience that love is to withdraw it from the senses by simran and dhyān and attach it to the divine melody within. Because the mind is fond of pleasures, when it gets a better pleasure than the sensual pleasures, it automatically leaves the sensual pleasures. So the more the mind is attached to Shabd and Nam within, the more the soul starts shining within – what we call a higher consciousness. That is our concept of love.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



The Remedy

Anxiety is a common ailment these days. It is defined as a nervous condition involving excessive worry, overthinking and fear, usually resulting from imagining negative outcomes. The most common complaint of someone suffering from anxiety is that they can't stop thinking. From this perspective, it would be safe to say that most human beings suffer from anxiety in one way or another.

Disciples on the spiritual path are no exception. At every question-and-answer session, inevitably someone will say to the Master, "When I meditate, I cannot concentrate. I cannot stop thinking about all the things going on in my life."

Mystics tell us that if there is one thing that stands in the way of our experiencing the Shabd, it is uncontrolled thinking.

As long as we keep thinking, we will forever remain like an airplane flying in circles, unable to land at the seat of consciousness.

Who is watching where our thoughts take us? Is anyone in control of our undisciplined mind? Like a spoiled brat, our outward, undisciplined mind does as it pleases. Our thoughts wander on their own without anyone keeping watch over them or being careful where they take us. We have become addicted to keeping our mind entertained in the world. We have no control over this addiction. The outward mind is always multitasking. We can be streaming YouTube videos, tweeting, checking out how many 'likes' or new friends we have on Facebook, listening to our playlist, taking a selfie – all this while thinking about other stuff.

Our addiction to thinking has become such second nature for us that now we can't even consider the possibility that there is a whole different aspect of our mind that is beyond thinking.

from self to Shabd

Sant Mat teaches us that the way to go beyond thinking is to raise our attention to where the mind becomes motionless. In the Bible it is written, "Be still and know that I am God". Only when we go beyond ourselves and our mind becomes still, can we enter the realm of peace.

Throughout the decades, the true Masters have advised us again and again that the way to do this is through simran. When we do simran during the day when the mind is free, it may not seem like we are doing anything significant, but it makes a big difference. As the saying goes, every penny makes a pound. Little efforts of remembrance strung together help us detach our attention from the human experience so that when we sit for meditation, it is that much easier to gather the attention at the eye centre.

Consider this analogy. Imagine a bowl of honey sitting on a table. Now take a tiny marble and put it on top of the honey. The marble would sit there on top of the honey and perhaps very slowly sink into the honey. Now put a pair of arms and legs on this tiny marble and imagine this marble man flinging his arms and legs about, what would happen? Marble man would most likely sink faster and deeper into the honey. But if he were to just be still on top of the honey, he would probably remain buoyant for some time.

In this analogy, marble man is our attention; the honey is our human experience; and marble man flinging his arms and legs is our thinking. The more we think – the more we entertain the mind with frivolous thoughts – the deeper we sink into the sticky experience of our human life. So imagine if for the entire day, amidst all our worldly obligations and responsibilities, we keep thinking about our work, our problems and worries, and on top of that, during every free moment we are on our phone, reading and playing games. By the time we sit for meditation, how much simran would marble man have to do to get to the eye centre? Two hours would hardly be sufficient.

On the other hand, if we were to put our attention towards simran (or listening to the sound whenever one hears it) instead of, let's say, endlessly checking WhatsApp, email or Instagram, the attention would not sink so deep into the human experience. Eventually, when we sit for meditation, it would be that much easier to collect the attention and raise it to the eye centre.

By repeating simran (the words given at the time of initiation) we slow down our endless, uncontrolled thinking. Once thinking slows down and

the mind is concentrated at the eye centre, then by focusing the attention on being receptive to the sound within, thinking will go by default into 'pause mode' and the mind will become still. This will allow us to move into a higher level of consciousness, different from that of thinking, and conscious contact with Shabd will be a real experience.

from self to Shabd

Simran is the ultimate remedy for anxiety. It is also the key to accessing the Shabd. Once we learn to get in touch with the Shabd at will, we will be able to put our thinking on 'pause' and automatically, anxiety will be replaced by peace, brought on by an attitude of acceptance and surrender.

Besides, the mystics ask us: What is there to think about anyway? Basically, our entire life is programmed. Like a movie that has already been released, nothing can be changed.

When a movie is released, wherever or whenever anyone watches that movie, it will always be the same movie. Whether it has a happy ending or a sad ending, whether one likes it or does not like it, one could analyze and dissect it to death but not a single scene can be changed because the movie has already been released. It's a done deal.

The same is true for the movie of every human life. It has been released and has been playing since the day we were born. It is for this reason Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us that "nothing is in our hands, that what has to happen has already happened at a different level, at a different stage."

The question is whether one is able to recognize that fact and relax, sit back and watch the movie of our life as a silent spectator. Sometimes, there are episodes of drama, sometimes comedy; sometimes there are heart-warming scenes and sometimes there are horror scenes. But in the end, there is really nothing anyone can do except watch it all unfold. So what is the use of getting anxious?

Worldly activities go on according to previous karmas: as the karmas become manifest, they work themselves out. So have no apprehension about them; sometimes they are good, sometimes bad. There should be no anxiety about them; your anxiety should be about meditation.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*



“Yes ... You Shall Have Me”

After finishing his primary education at Balsarai, Maharaj Charan Singh attended the high school in the village of Baba Bakala, about a three-mile walk from the Dera. In those days, the way to Baba Bakala was through fields and uneven terrain. Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, even at that young age, used to cover the three-mile distance every morning on foot and walk back in the evening. Thus from early boyhood he became used to long walks and developed a liking for them. At times, when he walked back from the school after playing football and other games, it would be dark by the time he reached Dera.

Kind and tolerant from the beginning, Maharaj Charan Singh Ji would never complain or bother anyone about his personal needs. Once Bibi Ralli bought him a pair of new shoes for school, but they were a bit small, and therefore uncomfortable for him. He wore these ill-fitting shoes out of the Dera every morning on his way to school, left them in a bush just outside the Dera, and picked them up in the evening on his way home. One day, the Great Master was taking an evening walk with Bhai Shadi in the direction of Baba Bakala and saw young Charan returning from school barefoot. When he asked where his shoes were, the boy replied that they were in the bushes because he was unable to walk in them. The Great Master was moved; he asked Bibi Ralli to get new shoes for the boy and cautioned her to be more careful about young Charan Singh's needs and comfort.

Durga Das Sehgal relates an incident about young Charan Singh's love for his Master. When he was only ten or eleven years old, he went to the Great Master one day after returning from school and bowed at his feet, almost embracing them. Hazur lovingly patted him on the back and said, “Son, I am very pleased with you. Ask for anything and I'll give it to you.” He replied, “I have nothing to ask for.” Hazur said once again, “Ask! Whatever you want you shall have.” When the boy made the same reply and Hazur repeated the question, Charan Singh replied, “I only want you – nothing but you.” Maharaj Ji's face lit up, and with pleasure he said, “Yes, my son, you shall have me.”

Heaven on Earth



Our Wake-Up Call

Things have probably never looked rougher. The world as we know it has turned upside down. All that we have taken for granted has been uprooted and redefined, as we face looming uncertainties on a day-to-day basis. This may sound like the review of a horror film, but it is in fact a reality the entire world has been dealing with in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. For some it is about survival; for others it is a question of navigating through a complex series of complete unknowns.

Man invites his own calamities and then protests against the irksome guests, having forgotten how and when and where he penned and sent out the invitations. But time does not forget; and time delivers in due season each invitation to the right address; and time conducts each invitee to the dwelling of the host.

The Book of Mirdad

Do we really understand the law of karma and how it affects our lives? If we did, we wouldn't feel troubled by these circumstances. Nor would we go through the exhaustion or the frustration of trying to and change the many aspects of our life that don't seem to make sense, are seemingly unfair, or are not working the way we want.

The law of karma dictates that everything that happens to us is a direct or indirect consequence of our previous actions, either in this present life or a past life.

There are no accidents in time and space. But all things are ordered by the Omniwill, which neither errs in anything, nor overlooks a thing.

The Book of Mirdad

So, where do we draw the line of how far we need to go to better our lot, to improve life's conditions for ourselves and for those we care for? How and where do we define the parameters of what to accept and what to expect from life? If, ultimately, we have no control over our present destiny, how do we know when to put our hands up and save ourselves all the sweat and toil?

The answers to our questions lie more in the approach we have to life and in our attitude. Our lives resemble a ship sailing the oceans, having to face the ebbs and flows as they arrive. We know that every voyage has its fair share of turbulence and thunderous storms, accompanied by stretches of smooth sailing and bright skies. And yet in our lives, we long for cool gentle breezes and never-ending sunshine and try to avoid messy hiccups and misfortunes. We see these as undesirable impediments along the way to achieving our higher goals. We complain, we clamour for the easy path, we hold on to our attachments and refuse to let go. Seeking stability and security, we grab hold of our material comforts, failing to address the bigger questions.

Maybe the Lord has put these so-called obstacles in our lives to help us to grow and to appreciate and strengthen our faith. There is always a tug from the Creator to pull us up to him, if we were attuned enough to be receptive to it. As we climb the tree of life, instead of going up, where the view is clearer and the air is cleaner, we hold on to the shrubs and weeds at the bottom. We are so entangled with our earthly belongings that we don't take the trouble to focus on where he wants to take us.

It is said that rock bottom is a solid foundation on which to rebuild one's life.

Our wake-up call comes in the form of mystics. They are the only ones capable of yanking us out of here, reminding us of how close we are to reaching our spiritual home. They instill in us a need to be vigilant; to remember why we are here and where we are headed. They implore us to take action, to prepare ourselves for that journey that ultimately every being has to face. Their wisdom resonates profoundly within the depths of our soul, and their presence in our lives captures our attention.

But what are they trying to tell us?

For thousands of years monks and hermits who lived closed solitary lives were convinced that the secret to life's mysteries could be found in silence.

There is a story of a Buddhist monk who asks his teacher to talk to him about the source of all creation. Upon hearing the question, the teacher remains silent. The student repeats the question again, only to be met with the same stoic silence. After further attempts by the disciple,

the teacher finally opens his mouth and says, “I am instructing you, but you are not listening.”

The answer was, of course, silence.

One of the objectives of this path is for us to learn to listen – to ascertain the truth of the Divine through personal experience. Experience of what? Of the sound current, the logos, the whisper of the word of God. This happens when we heed his message and guidance – when we sit in silence. That’s what we do when we practise our meditation. We attune our inner selves to that beautiful silence and shut out the constant clatter of the world and the chatter of our wayward mind. By focusing on this inner silence, we direct our attention to the primal source from which all answers and knowledge emanate. We may go far and wide searching for our true identity, but the moment of epiphany occurs when we return home and put the key in the lock. We may well discover that what we are looking for is really, in fact, inside ourselves. God does not make himself known with great fanfare and thunder, but to a silent listening heart.

Sant Mat teaches us to listen with focused attention, slowly transforming each and every individual practitioner. It is this heightened form of understanding that will help us explain the untold mysteries of life. It is this elevated form of consciousness that will help us traverse our karmic mesh and give us the opportunity to understand the secret workings of the Creator.

Soami Ji summarizes these thoughts beautifully:

*Now that you have received this human form,
strive to accomplish your own real work.
Do not get embroiled in the affairs of this world,
think of it as no more than a night’s dream.
This body is false, as are its relationships,
so why exhaust yourself over an illusion?*

Soami Ji, *Sar Bachan Poetry*



The Real Miracle

During our trials and tribulations, when all avenues are exhausted and all hope is lost, we often say, “Let’s pray for a miracle.” The English Oxford Dictionary defines a miracle as “an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency.”

When we read about the lives of saints, we sometimes come across stories of miracles meant to inspire, or ignite faith and belief in God. Today, however, the common view is that miracles are life-saving occurrences, which lead us to believe that our circumstances and our destinies can be altered by some form of divine intervention.

But Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I that “Saints never interfere with the destiny of anybody at all.”

On the other hand, Hazur often related that miracles do happen in the lifetime of saints because they are compassionate, kind and soft-hearted.

But performing miracles or attracting people by miracles is not their purpose of coming to this world. And a real miracle is something individual between the disciple and the Master. It is not a public demonstration.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III

When Hazur acknowledges the occurrence of miracles but at the same time affirms that nothing can change a disciple’s destiny, what is the real miracle that the Master is referring to? How does the Master help his disciples when he does not change the unfortunate circumstances in their lives?

In the Bible, we read: “For judgment came I into this world, that they that see not may see; and that they that see may become blind.” This means that a true Master seeks to change our attitude in life. Maharaj Charan Singh beautifully explains this biblical passage:

Those who see only the world, see only the creation, are attached only to the creation – I have come to make them blind, meaning I have come to

detach them from this creation. And I want to give them those eyes which see only the Father.

Bible, John 9:39

When the Master initiates us and we practise meditation, we slowly detach from this creation and become attached to the Creator. For a disciple, this gradual change in attitude – from being attached to everything worldly to being content with our destiny and being at peace with ourselves – is considered a miracle in itself.

Hazur Maharaj Ji goes on to explain what the natural signs are when this transformation takes place.

People who were running after worldly things and worldly desires don't want to look at them anymore, don't want to see them and they have no time to talk to anybody. Day and night they are filled with love and devotion for the Father. What more of a miracle can a disciple have than this? His whole approach to life changes. Where people weep and cry, a disciple becomes happy. That is a miracle, which comes into every person's life when he comes to the path.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

When we achieve this state of contentment in our lives, we do not feel the need to seek happiness from anything worldly, be it material things or relationships. We find ourselves accepting any situation we are in, and adversities no longer disturb our peace of mind. But how do we attain this peaceful state of mind? How will this miraculous change in our attitude occur?

First, we need to understand who the Master is and who he is not. He is not a genie who grants our every wish, nor is he a doctor who cures our illnesses. He is not a stockbroker who advises us on our financial investments; nor is he a marriage counsellor who will help us reconcile differences we have with our spouses; nor is he an astrologer who reads into our future. The Master is our living guide who has come to this world to inspire us to turn towards the Lord.

Second, we need to understand the nature of a “miracle” in Sant Mat. We like to give credit to the Master when something good happens in

our life or when a wish of ours is 'granted'. But those circumstances may have already been in our destiny due to our past good karmas. Likewise, if something does not go our way, then we drag the Master down from the same pedestal that we once put him on. That is a very unstable foundation on which to build our faith.

Maharaj Charan Singh Ji defines what a true miracle is and how the change in our attitude occurs.

A miracle is the remission of our karmas – how much remission we get inside, what help we get to go through our karmas in this life so that we are not affected by the worst karmas which we have to face. These are the miracles of the Master. He gives us strength to face those karmas, so they are just pinpricks for us now.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

This is further explained in the following passage:

By doing the daily meditation practice, repeating simran during the day, and following the instructions given to us at the time of initiation, we slowly and gradually develop a level of equanimity that enables us to go through the ups and downs of life without losing our balance. Peace of mind and confidence come from the practice. The understanding dawns that whatever is happening is just the unfolding of our own karmic account. Slowly and gradually, an appreciation of the master's ever-present support grows within us.

A Wake Up Call

There are two ways we can approach the spiritual path. One way would be to beg the Master to change the circumstances of our lives. That option would lead us nowhere because the Masters almost always adhere to the laws of nature. Insisting on what we want only weakens our will-power and causes us even more unhappiness.

The other way is to simply obey the Master's instructions and do our daily practice of meditation. The clear reason to support this option is stated in a letter from Baba Jaimal Singh to his disciple Baba Sawan Singh:

Whatever karmas are written on your forehead cannot be erased by anyone. Have firm faith and remain content in your mind. Always keep the Satguru's form in your mind. Then the mind, becoming pure, will receive the full rapture of the Dhun. Worldly hopes, desires, and attachments, which are the root of all suffering, will then immediately leave the mind. They will never stay where the perfect Satguru's form is present.

Spiritual Letters

Baba Jaimal Singh assures us that if we remain steadfast in the practice of listening to the Shabd, all our worries of the world will disappear. In the presence of the Shabd – which is the true form of the Master – nothing remains.

Our attitude towards life should be positive. Whatever is in our destiny, fortunate or unfortunate, will give us the opportunity to clear our load of karmas and achieve spiritual maturity. As Hazur Maharaj Ji explains about difficult circumstances:

It may be essential for the patient to take that bitter medicine. At the most, the doctor will sugar-coat it. So similarly, the Master will give us strength to face that situation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

As disciples, we have to accept the fact that sometimes, the Master's grace can be a bitter pill. He will do whatever it takes to make us blind to the world and open our eyes to the eternal truth. This, by itself, is the greatest form of grace and the real miracle.



Heart to Heart

A Patient Welfare Officer at the Beas Hospital relates his experience with a patient:

An old man came hobbling into the hospital using two sticks for support. I asked him, "What is the problem?"

He said, "Eye problems."

I said, "Why didn't you bring your son to help you?"

He said, "I have heard that in Maharaj Ji's house there is no need of a son or helper. The sevadars in Maharaj Ji's house will help me."

He was admitted and the eye specialists operated on him. When he recovered, he bowed to the Guru with whose grace he recovered the use of his eyes, without the help of his sons.

Labour of Love

During a question-and-answer session, Hazur Maharaj Ji spoke about the Great Master's sense of humour:

I am yet to see anybody with such a sense of humour. Not only was he full of humour in his private life, but in public also. You see, for a speaker – being a speaker myself, I know – it is very difficult to be humorous with an audience, and especially with Sant Mat, which is such a serious subject, because you always talk of hell and heaven and karmas and sins and all those things. But when you see movies and photos of him, he is often roaring with laughter. He could not conceal his happiness or smiles even in the open satsang. The Mehtas and so many other people have taken pictures of him when he was laughing like anything – in an open satsang. It is difficult even in a small group to laugh and chat and express yourself, but he was able to express himself with laughter and happiness in the open satsang.

When you are happy within, you cannot help sharing happiness. If you go to a miserable person, he will make you miserable; if you go to a happy person, he will make you happy. And saints cannot help radiating happiness.

Spiritual Heritage



BOOK REVIEW

Man's Search for Meaning

BY VIKTOR E. FRANKL

PUBLISHER: BOSTON MA: BEACON PRESS, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8070-6010-0

Freed from the Dachau concentration camp at the end of World War II, Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) emerged bearing a message of optimism, faith, and meaning, asserting that every human has the capacity and responsibility to choose his own attitude and actions based on his own inner purpose. He chose to respond to fear with fortitude, to tragedy with hope, and to atrocities with love. His survival was a triumph of spirit over circumstance proving (in the words of Nietzsche) that: "He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How."

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

The ability to remain humane and compassionate under these circumstances could only be "the result of an inner decision." Frankl concluded, "It is this spiritual freedom – which cannot be taken away – that makes life meaningful and purposeful."

Before Frankl was imprisoned, he had been a psychiatrist and professor of both neurology and psychiatry. He wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* in nine successive days in 1945, shortly after his release from the camp. William J. Winslade, a philosopher, lawyer, and psychoanalyst, said of Frankl:

As a prisoner, he was suddenly forced to assess whether his own life still had any meaning. Frankl drew constantly upon uniquely human capacities such as inborn optimism, humor, psychological detachment,... and a steely resolve not to give up or commit suicide.... Most important, he realized that, no matter what happened, he retained the freedom to choose how to respond to his suffering.

In his book Frankl shares in simple language the depths of personal suffering and the heights of human aspiration and achievement. He clarifies that suffering is not necessary to find meaning; rather, “meaning is possible in spite of suffering.”

It is difficult to walk with Frankl as he describes life in the concentration camps. He relates his experiences in a direct, sensory way that evokes in the reader both physical and emotional sensations. He describes the scene on the train as they approached Auschwitz, the first camp to which he was taken:

A cry broke from the ranks of the anxious passengers, “There is a sign, Auschwitz!” Everyone’s heart missed a beat at that moment. Auschwitz – the very name stood for all that was horrible: gas chambers, crematoriums, massacres. Slowly, almost hesitatingly, the train moved on as if it wanted to spare its passengers the dreadful realization as long as possible: Auschwitz!

The reality of life in the camp quickly revealed itself. “We were cold and hungry and there was not enough room for everyone to squat on the bare ground, let alone to lie down. One five-ounce piece of bread was our only food in four days.” The probability of imminent death was apparent to prisoners from their first encounter with the camp guards. An SS officer examined each new prisoner and then indicated with his hand which way they were to go. “It was my turn. Somebody whispered to me that to be sent to the right side would mean work, the way to the left being for the sick and those incapable of work.” Sent to the right, Frankl later asked other prisoners about what happened to a friend of his, sent to the left.

“You can see him there,” I was told.

“Where?” A hand pointed to the chimney a few hundred yards off, which was sending a column of flame up into the grey sky of Poland.

“That’s where your friend is, floating up to Heaven.”

Throughout this odyssey of suffering we witness the choices that Frankl and his fellow prisoners continuously make. Some “run to the wire” choosing instant death, others fall into apathy and despair, but Frankl chooses to live from the bedrock of his belief that

we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then

matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement.... We are challenged to change ourselves.

He describes an incident when he was on a forced march side by side with another prisoner. He was pushed to the limit of his endurance, yet sustained himself by the beauty of nature and the love of his wife.

And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds.... A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth... that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire.... The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss ... in the contemplation of his beloved.

After the war Frankl practised as a psychiatrist, lectured, and wrote. He propounded a psychoanalytic practice he called logotherapy, focusing on “the meaning of human existence as well as on man’s search for such a meaning.” He distinguished between man’s will to pleasure (the pleasure principle) and man’s will to meaning; he argued that “man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life.” Frankl considered this to be the primary motivation of human life.

Once this meaning is identified, it must be used as the springboard for all actions. This was reflected in what Frankl describes as “the deepest experience I had in the concentration camp.” He describes how against all odds – the chance just to survive was only one in twenty-eight – he had managed to keep hidden a manuscript of his book on logotherapy. He relates how he lost his treasured manuscript when “I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had already been sent to the gas chamber.” In place of his book he “found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat one single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, Shema Yisrael.” He had lost his life’s work but chose to see a message and opportunity in what had transpired. “How should I have interpreted

such a ‘coincidence’ other than as a challenge to live my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?”

From the camp Frankl returned to a world where he was utterly alone. On his first day in Vienna he learned that his pregnant wife Tilly had died of sickness or starvation in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. His parents and brother had also died in the camps. In spite of loss and tragedy, Frankl chose to continue to help others and to forgive. Throughout his life he continued to believe that “even a vile Nazi criminal or a seemingly hopeless madman has the potential to transcend evil or insanity by making responsible choices.” As he said, “After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord’s Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips.”



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